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Class period 1/2

Departed So Long

Finally, after 19 long years my mom wants to meet me! We never knew each other because my mother gave me to my grandma when I was only five months old. I haven’t been told much why I haven’t seen her since, but I’ve considered my grandparents my parents. Even after my grandpa died when I was 11 years old, my grandma still took care of me. I was born in Mexico but raised in San Diego in a community called Linda Vista, on Kelly Street. At the time we were living in a lower income community, but the people were so close. Maybe our neighbors were friendly with us because I was so little at the time. I enjoyed the days I was able to run outside and play with my friends; I really enjoyed having parties and eating the food our neighbors would make.

That’s all in the past; right now my mother is about to walk in my grandma’s house and I already feel the anticipation I’ve had for 19 years. The sudden cool wind filled the room as the front door gently opens and I was blinded by the sun’s glare. My mother walked in with beautiful black hair, brown eyes, and a big smile on her face. I bite my lip, feeling a metallic taste of blood, and tap my fingers, hoping to calm down my anxiety.

“Mom!” I shout out loud, filling the entire living room. I had seen pictures of her when she was younger, some in black and white, others in bad quality, but I never imagined my mother being so beautiful. I really love the dark blue dress she is wearing, because it’s one of my favorite colors. Her earrings are small but glistening a bright white, and her light brown skin color almost matches mine.

“Mijo is that you?” She looked twice to try and recognize me, and held a picture of me when I was 9 years old. “Antonio you’re so big!”

I remembered how small I used to be compared to my tios. When I visited my tios in Mexico, we would ride their mini motorcycle around their ranch and eat home cooked food. My tio Santiago would tell me I looked like him when he was a kid; I never believed him because the pictures didn’t match.

“I didn’t recognize you mijo, because you are a man now,” she said warmly.

“Mom it’s so good to see you, I never forgot about you once and here you are now,” I said excitedly. In the past 19 years, my mother has done a lot without me. Did she accomplish all the dreams she set out? I’m wondering if she proud of me and what I’ve done.

“Mom, I want to ask you so many things. Tell me about Denise, I remember my grandma speaking about her. All I know is that she was handicapped, and that you took care of her,” I asked directly. I asked myself, *Why did she spent her time taking care of her instead of me?*

She looked at the ceiling for a moment trying to recall her memories. “I looked after Denise for 12 years, however she died in her home by choking on a piece of food; she lived 29 years. A drunk man crashed into her car when she was 18 and left her handicapped. Denise couldn’t walk by herself even with her walker,” she looked gloomy. *I don’t know how to respond, Denise should've deserved more.*

“It’s a shame, she was such a bright person, but she wasn’t able to talk since the incident, I could only speak when Denise pointed at alphabetical letters.” *I couldn’t imagine the loneliness of being in that situation. I could understand being without someone for so long; Denise needed my mom. It really is a shame she was disabled. But, I still wish my mom could have been with me.*

“Mijo your Grandma told me that you broke up with your novio last week. I want to know why you didn’t talk with your grandma; if you're hurt I’m here for you.” She looks concerned. *I broke up with her, so it didn’t affect me that much. She cheated on me and I found out when I went to her house. Margarita was all over that man, I asked her about it the next day and I ended it with her. We were together for a year but I guess not everything lasts.*

“Mom I don’t need to talk about it. I’m over it and I just want to forget about it. But there is something I’ve been meaning to tell you,” I said bluntly.

She looked away from me for a moment and said “Okay mijo it’s fine if you don’t want to talk about it, but again I’m here if you need me. Tell me about this story then,” she said calmly.

“Mom when I was 8 years old my sister and I had two birds. I had a Zebra Finch, and my sister had a Canary. Mine was a boy, with stunning grey and black feathers, orange cheeks, a bright red beak. My sister’s bird was a bright beautiful yellow Canary, with a snow white beak,” I recalled with enthusiasm. *As I’m telling her about the birds, I wonder why does this story have priority over any other event that’s happened to me? Like that bike accident I had when I was 16 or when I was sick with the flu all week?*

I continued. “Grandpa bought those two birds when grandma couldn’t walk because the arthritis in her knee kept bugging her, so the birds helped the three of us to not worry about her while she was in the hospital for 3 months.” *The arthritis happened so suddenly, abuela was worried for her health. My grandma was in so much pain, and ended up going to the hospital not wanting to leave her grand kids. Those birds helped me and my sister not miss my mother when we had them. We would try and teach those birds tricks but they wouldn’t even try no matter how much we fed them treats.*

“My sister and I saw this movie umm.. What’s it called again?” I squinted at the thought. “Well there's this part, where the main character releases their pet birds into the wild, with his friend or sister; something like that. So, like the knuckle heads we were, we went outside and held our pet birds in the palm of our hands.” *I paused. It took some time to catch my breathe from the long story. My mother waits for the end of my story.*

“Immediately after I let go of my bird I regretted it, so I tried to catch it but the damn bird was too fast!” We both started laughing, I don’t know why either, we just stood there giggling. I remember feeling the soft feathers loosen in my hands, and feeling I lost my mother again. I don’t want to upset my mother, I might as well tell a joke I usually say in this story.

“The only thing I was worried about, was where the damn bird was going to get it’s food.” I shuffled my feet realizing I had been standing too long.

“That’s a funny story Mijo.” she continued to giggle, brushing the few tears from her face.

“Mom can you tell me about how you met my dad? I would really love to hear it from you.” I asked contently.

“Okay Antonio if that is what you want.” she is expressing a big smile, I wanted to know how my parents met for such a long time; what did they see in each other to fall in love?

“21 years ago, we met in Chula Vista. I was driving a close friend, and your dad brought another friend, so we went to a restaurant, ate, *and* laughed. We kept meeting afterwards by going to the park, meeting his parents and your dad meeting your sister.” She looked so bubbly.

“After 2 months your father asked me to go out with him because before he met me your father was alone.” She paused, and lifted a recently taken photo with me and my grandma taken by a friend of mine. I stood there feeling compassionate for her.

“The memory is fuzzy, but I hope my answer is enough Antonio. Sorry...I talked too long; anything else you want to know?” she said, with a relief. I pondered the question for a moment, and understood the story how these two strangers eventually became man and wife. Without them falling in love I wouldn’t be alive obviously, so I’m glad they met.

“Antonio, tell me about your faith because your grandma mentioned it to me earlier. She said it’s been a big part of your life, and it’s changed you a lot.” My mother wiped her tears again. The cold draft of air fills the room again, I take off the jean jacket I’m wearing, and hold it in one hand to give it to my mom. She wrapped herself with it, holding onto the worn out jacket as if it were a blanket.

I took a breath allowing the memories to flood back: “When I was 5 years old I started to go to first communion, and after that I helped the priest in mass. If I recall... at age 8 I stopped going for 7 or more years. I felt like I didn’t need to go anymore.” I walk to the door and close it prevent the freezing draft from interrupting us.

“However when high school started my Grandma put me in youth group. It was fun, I had many memories there I won’t forget.” The memories long forgotten began to flow into me again.

“I’m still in youth group now because the people I have made many friends, and there's always someone to talk to when I’m going through anything.” I looked downward to the solid oak flooring, I’m reminded of the emotional talks given by our youth leaders, there were many moments where they showed brokenness and sadness. I knew a lot of students who didn’t care, *the* only things that mattered to them was social media, football, or their looks. When I looked at myself, my long hair, untrimmed black eyebrows, worn out converse shoes, Irealized I never really cared for looks, only the need for clothes to cover my body.

“I go every Sunday to preach about Jesus, his teachings, and how it relates to us.” My church friends comforted me and helped me open all my bottled emotions of missing my mother. Several tears rush down my face. Surprised by the sudden emotion I quickly brush them off, seeing my mother’s empathetic face. “Mijo it’s okay.” she tells me, “I haven’t seen you this way, but I feel I should have been there for you. Want me to tell you why I haven’t visited earlier?” I have to know, why wasn’t she here? Why couldn’t she talk with me like this? All the other times I’ve broken down and cried?

“I.. well mijo I-I-I wanted to come earlier, but I couldn’t face the guilt of leaving you…” I realizing I haven’t been the only one suffering, so why is my heart aching, the pain constricting like a boa.

“I’ve been waiting mom, 19 years I’ve waited to meet you. Here you are, so tell me *now*-about why you’ve been gone for so long.”

“Well mijo, it’s not that I couldn’t visit you sooner, but the blame kills me as well as the guilt. If only I’ve been a better mother you could have been with me,” she said dejectedly.

She took a deep breath and continued: “Someone broke into our old home and took the 2,000 dollars I was saving and I couldn’t afford to keep you, so I left you with your grandparents.”

“Why do I feel like I lost something I never had.” Bursts of sobbing came abruptly. In a low voice she spoke over and over again.

“I wish I was there, I should have been there for you. I wish I was there I *should* have been there for you.” I held her for as long as she needed, knowing I had some place to go. I remember all the anger in my heart screaming in my head, *Mom didn’t you want to see your babies grow?* But by meeting my mom again, it has all been washed away by her gentle love.

I realize now that I haven’t thought of how important it is to say my feelings to someone I care about. I wrap my two arms across my mother, the one who has been away for longest time, because of that I feel as if she’s everything I’ve longed for. I sob for a moment, remembering all the lonely nights I’ve spent praying wondering if I am loved. I pull away from my mother seeing the anguish in her face.

I remember I heard someone tell me *Once in a lifetime you meet someone who changes everything*; I think I understand what that means now.